

Lake County News Sun Editorial, August 1, 2007

In 1972, then federal prosecutor James Thompson filed a criminal complaint against the North Shore Sanitary District and several lakefront manufacturing firms in Waukegan, including the then-bustling U.S. Steel Waukegan Works, accusing them of daily letting 5.5 million gallons of rusty water get into Lake Michigan. The suit alleged the discharged water contained high quantities of iron, zinc, phosphorous, oil and acid. A year prior to that, the Illinois League of Women Voters sued the NSSD to stop sending raw sewage into the Big Lake.

We haven't learned much in 35 years, from what BP is considering at its Whiting, Ind., refinery. The global gasoline firm wants to dump 54 percent more ammonia and 35 percent more industrial waste into the southern end of Lake Michigan as part of a \$3.8 billion expansion project. Amazingly, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management issued a permit for BP to dump more pollutants, while the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency apparently signed off on BP's plan.

A large amount of state and federal aid was pumped into the sanitary district and by 1976, with the opening of the Gurnee treatment plant, the NSSD no longer was dumping into the lake. Yet today, Lake Michigan remains in danger from BP's increased pollution to asbestos along the Illinois Beach State Park shoreline.

What's worrisome is that except for a handful of public officials and environmental activists, no one appears to care that the source of the region's drinking water and recreational activities is being abused once again.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, has taken a step to address this with the formation this week of the Shoreline Mayors Task Force, a group whose membership includes Waukegan, North Chicago, Lake Bluff, Lake Forest, Highwood and Highland Park, along with counterparts in Cook County. The panel will tackle a wide range of lake issues, including beach closings, sewage dumping, asbestos, and mercury and PCB contamination.

At the same time, Kirk has introduced an amendment to a congressional energy package that

would deny tax credits to refineries that increase pollution into the Great Lakes. Now that really would scare a multinational company with billions in the bank.

We believe BP, stuffed with record profits, has enough money to treat the leftovers from its refining process on site. If not, then the feds, Illinois and Michigan should take the oil giant to court to stop it from further spoiling the lake.
It's worked before.